

## Introduction

Known for her beloved Ya-Ya books (*Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood*, *Little Altars Everywhere*, and *Ya-Yas in Bloom*), Rebecca Wells has helped women name, claim, and celebrate their shared sisterhood for over a decade. *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* held the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list for sixty-eight weeks, became a knockout feature film, sold more than 5 million copies, and inspired the creation of Ya-Ya clubs worldwide.

Now Wells debuts an entirely new cast of characters in this shining stand-alone novel about the pull of first love, the power of life, and the human heart's vast capacity for healing.

*The Crowning Glory of Calla Lily Ponder* is the sweet, sexy, funny journey of Calla Lily's life set in Wells's expanding fictional Louisiana landscape. In the small river town of La Luna, Calla bursts into being, a force of nature as luminous as the flower she is named for. Under the loving light of the Moon Lady, the feminine force that will guide and protect her throughout her life, Calla enjoys a blissful childhood—until it is cut short. Her mother, M'Dear, a woman of rapture and love, teaches Calla compassion, and passes on to her the art of healing through the humble womanly art of "fixing hair." At her mother's side, Calla further learns that this same touch of hands on the human body can quiet her own soul. It is also on the banks of the La Luna River that Calla encounters sweet, succulent first love, with a boy named Tuck.

But when Tuck leaves Calla with a broken heart, she transforms hurt into inspiration and heads for the wild and colorful city of New Orleans to study at L'Académie de Beauté de Crescent. In that extravagant big river city, she finds her destiny—and comes to understand fully the power of her "healing hands" to change lives and soothe pain, including her own. When Tuck reappears years later, he presents her with an offer that is colored by the memories of lost love. But who knows how Calla Lily, a "daughter of the Moon Lady," will respond?

A tale of family and friendship, tragedy and triumph, loss and love, *The Crowning Glory of Calla Lily Ponder* features the warmth, humor, soul, and wonder that have made Wells one of today's most cherished writers, and gives us an unforgettable new heroine to treasure.

## Questions for Discussion

1. Wells lives in Seattle now, but Louisiana is clearly still vivid in her life and work. Talk about Wells' fictional Louisiana, and how the setting of La Luna expands that growing landscape.
2. The natural world plays a major role in this story: the La Luna River and the Moon Lady are as fully realized and important as any of the human characters. Talk about how Wells is able to weave together the mystical and the ordinary. Why do you think this works?
3. *The Crowning Glory of Calla Lily Ponder* is a standalone novel, in which Rebecca Wells introduces a brand new character, Calla Lily Ponder. Wells has referred to this new book as a "spiritual cousin" to her Ya-Ya books. How do you think it relates to Wells' previous works?

4. Wells has long been praised for her ability to write honestly and movingly about family, friendship, and love—all important themes in this new book. How did she approach them differently (or similarly) to tell Calla's story—starting with the fact that there is one very central character here?
5. Wells' previous books have dealt extensively with the idea of sisterhood. This new novel depicts female friendships across racial, generational, and socio-economic lines. Talk about Calla's "sisters," and how each one provides different kinds of support for her emotional journey.
6. Wells has observed that in mythology, legend, and even in present time, hair symbolizes the soul. Hair plays a large role in Calla's life. What does "crowning glory" mean in this story? Why is it such a touchstone for Calla throughout her life, especially when paired with her memories of her childhood? What does the book's title signify to you?
7. From her mother, Calla inherits "healing hands," the power to not only beautify a woman's exterior but also to connect with and mend the emotional turmoil underneath. Why isn't it until her adult life in New Orleans that Calla is fully able to appreciate her gift?
8. Think about some of the unbreakable bonds Calla has in her life: with M'Dear, with Sukie. Talk about the Moon Lady's influence as a guiding force throughout Calla's life. Is it just as strong or even stronger than Calla's human relationships?
9. Over the course of the book, Calla experiences first love and then, later, a more mature love. How do the men in her life reflect both her essential nature and her growth? Talk about Wells' ability to depict male characters in this story.
10. Calla goes through heartbreak and loss throughout this story, but she manages to find inspiration through tragedy. How is she able to do this? Is this a strength she was born with?
11. What do you imagine might happen between Calla Lily and Tuck the day/week/month after they drink that cup of coffee together?

### **About the Author**

Rebecca Wells is a novelist, actor, and playwright. She is the author of the *New York Times* bestsellers *Ya-Yas in Bloom*, *Little Altars Everywhere* (winner of the Western States Book Award), and *Divine Secrets of the Ya-Ya Sisterhood* (winner of the American Booksellers Book of the Year Award, short-listed for the Orange Prize), which was made into a feature film. She performs from her work internationally, and her books have been translated into twenty-three languages. A native of Louisiana, she now makes her home on an island in Puget Sound, Washington, with her husband, their spaniel, and three sheep.